



DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES
Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



MEMORANDUM

To: All Staff

From: Joette Katz, Commissioner

Date: Friday, January 31, 2014

Subject: JJ Vision 2014

DCF's 2014 vision establishes the agency's priorities for the next year. The mission for the agency remains the same - "working together with families and communities for children who are healthy, safe, smart and strong." As I have stated many times, this mission applies to all children whom we serve, including youth who are committed to us through the juvenile justice system. Despite that repetition, since presenting the 2014 vision this past December, there have been many inquiries about whether these priorities apply to our juvenile justice work. So let me be clear, our mission, with all that it entails, applies equally to all of the work across the Department. This means that, as we strive to serve 90% of all children and families in community based settings universally across child welfare and juvenile justice, we have a lot of work to do, both internally at DCF, and externally with other agency, community, provider and advocacy partners.

Clearly, a challenge going forward rests on our ability to work collaboratively with each other and all of our partners to build an effective continuum of community based services that are developmentally appropriate, as well as culturally and linguistically competent. To meet the holistic needs of all the children we serve, these services must target the individualized needs of children, youth, and their families. These needs may include mental and behavioral health issues, educational challenges, vocational, housing or other supports that help ensure that families do not remain involved with us longer than necessary. For youth who are transitioning from our care, these needs also include preparing them for a successful transition to adulthood so that they are optimistic about their future and confident in their abilities to succeed as members of their community.

For youth transitioning from the juvenile justice system, our goals should be the same, but we must ensure that the communities to which they are transitioning are equipped to deliver the services and programs needed to prevent youth from becoming involved with the adult criminal justice system. Although I recognize that some of these youth may nevertheless end up there, despite our best efforts, that fact should not compromise our goal to achieve better outcomes for them. We can promote accountability for these youth and ourselves, as an agency dedicated to serve in their best interests, while balancing the public safety needs with better services and solution based case management that includes teaming with families, communities, service providers and other adults with whom the youth have a positive connection.

While much of the focus in my administration has been on transforming our child welfare practice, that should not be misconstrued as my lack of attention or commitment to the efforts needed to transform our case practice for our juvenile justice population. As you know through our efforts to decentralize, this has included shifting parole services back to the Regions, which I believe are best equipped with knowledge and expertise to meet our

statutory mandates across child welfare and juvenile justice. It is my vision that, ultimately, each Area Office will see the formation of a symbiotic relationship across all of our disciplines. The Regional management structure will benefit from having juvenile justice experts who can inform and educate those for whom this area is “new”. Conversely, there are many potential benefits for Juvenile Justice Social Workers as members of the local team to understand the common themes that national research reveals for youth who have had historic involvement in both systems. This type of “cross-pollenization” will only strengthen our practice as we develop a more comprehensive understanding of youth who end up committed to us as delinquents and strive to better meet their needs.

Through our work with the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University, we know there are some shortfalls we must address if we are to make progress. Accordingly, we have extended our technical assistance with Georgetown so that we may address these issues. We will be finalizing an implementation plan for this work to carry us through 2014. This will include implementation of new policies and practice guides, development of a new risk classification and assessment tool in collaboration with our partners at CSSD, and creation of data dashboards that will help staff at all levels better understand our juvenile justice data so our decisions are outcome based. This work also will require a comprehensive assessment of our community based services for our juvenile justice population so that we can identify what we have and what we need if we are going to meet the goal of serving 90% of youth in community based settings.

Our Juvenile Justice Social Workers and Supervisors will be engaged actively in all of this, and with the technical assistance from Georgetown’s pool of national experts, there will be many opportunities for training, support and insight as we move ahead on this path. In addition, as we identify services and develop programming models, DCF administrators will be focused on securing funding to support the building of an effective community based service array with funding from grants, philanthropic support and reinvestment of existing dollars.

With this, our hard work must continue. It is also a tremendous and exciting opportunity for us to demonstrate our shared commitment to these youth that I know all of our Juvenile Justice Social Workers and Supervisors have always exhibited. We need to hold ourselves accountable to this collective vision across our agency at every level and across our areas of practice. We are a team. We each bring different experience and expertise, and this is where our strength lies as an agency. I believe that if we are maximizing all of our strengths effectively, the 2014 goals are achievable and when met, will result in better outcomes for all children, youth and families served by the Department.